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BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

Draft Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement
for Garnet Resource Area

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Missoula, Montana

March 1985

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INTRODUCTION

This draft Garnet Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) addresses future management options for approximately 145,660 surface acres and 213,385 acres of federal mineral estate administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through its Garnet Resource Area office in Missoula, Montana. Although the Garnet Resource Area encompasses nine counties in northwestern Montana, BLM administers substantial surface acreage in only three counties--Missoula, Granite, and Powell.

When completed, the Garnet RMP will provide a comprehensive framework for managing public land and allocating resources in the resource area during the next ten or more years. However, this RMP/EIS document is primarily focused on five broad issues and the decisions needed to address each issue. The broad issues involve the management of renewable resources, such as timber and livestock forage; special attention resources, including wilderness and wildlife habitat; nonrenewable resources, such as energy and minerals; land ownership and administration, including withdrawals and access; and recreation, cultural, and aesthetic resources.

The Garnet RMP/EIS is based on the concept of management areas as developed by the Lolo National Forest Plan. First, the capabilities of the land are evaluated in a resource inventory. Then possible management options, appropriate for managing the resources on the land, are developed. (Fourteen different management area prescriptions were developed for the Garnet RMP.) Next, the capabilities of a given area of land is matched with an array of management options; all of the options are compatible with the multiple use management directives of the BLM but give emphasis to different resources. Finally, the management options for all lands are arranged into five alternative management plans.

Five RMP alternatives are considered in this document. One represents no action, which means a continuation of current management direction. The other four alternatives provide a range of choices from those emphasizing resource protection to those emphasizing resource production.

The preferred alternative, which is the proposed Resource Management Plan, incorporates portions of the other four alternatives and generally represents a balance between resource production and environmental protection.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Consideration of threatened and endangered species in land use plans is required by bureau policy (IM-MT-83-340). This memo states that RMP's will contain:

1. A determination of habitat suitable and not suitable for T&E species.

2. Resolution of potential resource conflicts, and

3. Land allocations for the recovery of the listed species.

This biological assessment was prepared pursuant to Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act (1973, as amended). The purposes of the assessment are to (1) identify real or potential affects to listed species and their habitats resulting from the land use plan and (2) to facilitate compliance with the requirements of Section 7(a) of the Act.

Letters from the USFWS dated March 1981 and 23 January 1985 indicated that the following listed threatened and endangered (T&E) species may be present in the area covered by the RMP/EIS.

Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus)
Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus)
Grizzly Bear (Ursus arctos horribilis)
Gray Wolf (Canis lupus)

No proposed species (for listing) were indicated. This assessment is limited to the above species and will address each individually.

GRIZZLY BEAR

The BLM lands within the Garnet RMP/EIS contain no occupied or essential grizzly bear habitat. These lands lie south of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem (NCDGBE) and are separated by active ranching and timber harvest land uses on private holdings.

The presence of grizzly bears on BLM tracts may include chance occurrences in some seasonal habitat near the periphery of the delineated NCDGBE occupied habitat. (Recovery Plan)

Current status and habitat use was assessed during the RMP process through literature review; discussions and meetings with university, state, and federal personnel; and field inventory. The subsequent formulation of management area prescriptions (RMP, Appendix A) and their delineation in the preferred Alternative E provide mitigating measures along with oil and gas stipulations (Appendix O) to minimize adverse habitat modification and human disturbance. The plan provides for continuous monitoring for species occurrence and use with recommendations for mitigative stipulations.

Based upon the following factors:

1. Management area designations and prescriptions which mandate habitat maintenance or enhancement.

2. Oil and gas lease stipulations and limitations.

3. Allowance for future amendment or modification, based on continuous monitoring and acquired knowledge from research that precludes an irreversible commitment.

Our concluding assessment of the preferred alternative is "no effect".

GRAY WOLF

Information on gray wolf occurrence in Montana has been gathered by the Wolf Ecology Project, University of Montana (Mattson and Ream, 1978; Ream, unpub. data).

No confirmed gray wolf occurrence has been documented in the RMP area. After thorough review of literature; discussions and meetings with university, state, and federal personnel; and field inventory the Garnet Resource Area in June 1980 (Memo to Butte DO, dated June 18, 1980) concluded that there is no essential habitat or suitable unoccupied habitat for the wolf.

Researchers generally agree that the two most important factors in wolf recovery in Montana are (1) the availability and maintenance of a healthy prey base and (2) security of habitat including freedom from human persecution.

The implementation of the designated management areas will function to maintain and enhance big game habitat, control access and pesticide use, and regulate oil and gas activities through standard and special stipulations.

Based upon the following factors:

1. The Garnet Resource Area's current status of unconfirmed reports of single animals only.

2. Maintenance and enhancement of seasonal big game ranges.

3. Oil and gas stipulation application when appropriate.

4. Control of access and pesticide use.

5. The Wolf Recovery Plan does not identify any public land on the resource area as occupied habitat.

6. There are no public lands adjacent to essential habitat as identified in the Forest Service Essential Habitat Plan for the Northern Region.

Our concluding assessment of the preferred alternative is "no effect".

PEREGRINE FALCON

Potential peregrine falcon nesting habitat is found in several cliff sites in the Garnet Resource Area. The adjacent feeding zones are included in this habitat. No breeding pairs are known to occur on the resource area. Individual birds may occur in migration. A prairie falcon nesting survey and habitat analysis was performed on the Garnet Resource Area in 1983 in which several sites are also suitable as peregrine falcon nesting habitat.

Recovery depends largely on protection of the breeding sites, on reducing environmental contamination, and on reintroduction of captive young.

Through implementation of management area prescriptions (MA 1, 7, 8, 9, and 12), oil and gas stipulations, and because of topography, these sites will be protected from most land use activities.

Based upon these parameters our concluding assessment of the preferred alternative is "no effect".

BALD EAGLE

In 1981 the Garnet Resource Area delineated 734 acres in the Marcum Mountain area as essential bald eagle habitat. This included 161 acres of public land.

In addition there are eight active nest sites within the resource area on adjacent state and private lands, with potential nesting habitat on public lands. Winter ranges adjacent to wintering habitat provide a seasonal carrion base, and an important migration corridor.

Three major factors that may affect the bald eagle include: (1) habitat modification, (2) human disturbance (particularly during nesting), and (3) pesticides.

Floodplains of major streams are allocated to Management Area 1, which precludes use of pesticides, removes commercial forest land from harvest, and precludes timber harvest of noncommercial forest land. Adverse effects from habitat modification are therefore not anticipated. Communal roost habitat is included in the essential habitat delineation or within Management Area 12 (Visual Corridor) allocation. Winter ranges are allocated to Management Area 6 which provides for maintenance and enhancement of this habitat and insures a continued carrion source.

Based upon the following factors:

1. Floodplain allocation to Management Area 1.

2. Communal roosts and wintering habitat allocation to Management Area 12.

3. Winter range (carrion use) maintenance.

4. Oil and gas stipulations.

Our assessment of the preferred alternative is "no effect".

REFERENCES

American Peregrine Falcon Recovery Plan (Rocky Mountain Southwest Population) (Draft, May 1983).

Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan (Draft, 1984)

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Ault, K., J. Firebaugh, and D. Flath. (Pers. Comm.)

Pacific States Bald Eagle Recovery Plan (Draft, September 1982)

Ream, R. and U. Mattson. 1980. Wolf Status in the Northern Rockies. Wolf Ecology Project Report.

USDA, FS. 1980. Gray Wolf Essential Habitat in the Northern Region.

USDI, BLM. 1984. Garnet Resource Area RMP/EIS (Draft). Butte District Montana.

USDI, FWS. 1980. Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan.

USDI, FWS. 1982. Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.

Wright, M. 1983. Survey of Nesting Prairie Falcons. Garnet Resource Area, USDI, BLM.

APPENDIXES

1. Letter from USFWS on issues to be addressed in Garnet RMP
2. Letter to USFWS requesting T&E list
3. Letter from USFWS with T&E list
4. Oil and Gas Stipulations
5. Essential habitat map for bald eagle
6. Excerpts from RMP/EIS highlighting T&E provisions
7. Appendix A of RMP/EIS : Management Area Prescriptions
8. Map of Alternative E (preferred) depicting management areas